



Safe Schools/ Healthy Students

*Riverbend is
playing a key role
in an important
national project.*

See page 2.



Anxiety Groups for Kids

A new pilot program teaches kids skills to reduce anxiety, succeed in school, and more fully participate in the world around them.

See page 5.

Save the Date!

The 2015 **Champions for Mental Health Awards** will be held on October 7, at the Capital Center for the Arts, from 5:30–7:30 P.M.



Have a great day at the Boys & Girls Club!

Learn more about this great community resource, and how you can help make the summer totally awesome for local kids.

See page 7.

Integrated Care in our Schools and Community



The *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative* will bring new resources to our schools and community

As part of a broad and integrated response to the rising spectacle of violence in our nation's schools, the US Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Justice collaborated to create the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative*. This initiative developed a comprehensive and proven model for integrating the systems that promote students' mental health, enhance achievement, prevent violence and substance misuse, and create safe and respectful school climates.

Riverbend is playing a key role in implementing the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative* in Concord.

"Educators, administrators, parents, and kids are nervous these days," said Peter Evers, the President and CEO at Riverbend. "And who can blame them? These unfathomable tragedies are happening in our communities—in Newtown, Aurora, Oak Creek, Tucson, and elsewhere—and we should all be a bit scared," Evers continued.

"But the framers of the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project* recognized that the community mental health system can play

an important role in helping to positively shape the culture of our schools, and make them healthier and safer environments. How? By becoming a fully integrated part of that culture," Evers explained.

"This project has created an incredible opportunity to broaden the role of Riverbend clinicians in our schools and the wider community, and represents the cutting edge of what our integrated care model [see box below] is all about," Evers said.

Integrated Care

Integrated Care is the systematic coordination of general and behavioral healthcare services. Integrating mental health, substance abuse, and primary care services produces the best outcomes and has proven to be the most effective approach to caring for people with multiple health care needs.

The community mental health system can play an important role in helping to positively shape the culture of our schools, and make them healthier and safer environments.

— Peter Evers



Getting underway

In 2013, New Hampshire learned that it was one of seven states selected to be part of the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative*, and would receive an \$8.6 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA). After a year of planning, the initiative is now in the early stages of implementation in three New Hampshire school districts and communities: Concord, Laconia, and Rochester.

While the grant stipulates a range of general goals, data collection requirements, and other basic programmatic and reporting expectations, each school district is free to develop its own plan of action, utilizing local resources, to meet those goals.

Riverbend is one of several agencies and organizations [see box on page 4] working together with the Concord School District to achieve the following goals over the next four years:

- Improve access to behavioral health services in schools, and increase the number of children, youth, and families receiving them
- Reduce substance misuse among school-aged children
- Enhance resources to support healthy early childhood development
- Reduce school violence and bullying
- Connect families, schools, and communities

“The multi-agency collaboration is essential—not only to identify needs, but also to develop a strong set of specific actions to meet our goals,” said Stacy Lazzar, the Project Manager for the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative* at the Concord School District. “There are many moving parts to a project like this, and Riverbend’s involvement from the very beginning has been critical to help set our overall agenda for bringing the best evidence-based practices and programs to the work ahead.”

For each program goal, key partner agencies and organizations have been identified and specific action steps established, but it is expected that new partners will be added and action steps modified down the road as implementation gets underway.

“We are breaking new ground and exploring new territory, and we plan to be flexible and strategic in our implementation,” Lazzar said.

Riverbend’s involvement has been critical to help set our overall agenda for bringing the best evidence-based practices and programs to the work ahead.

— Stacy Lazzar



What this project means for Riverbend

“Riverbend has been working with children at local schools throughout our history,” said Chris Cummings, the Director of Children’s Services at Riverbend. “What’s different about our involvement in the *Safe Schools Healthy Students Project* is the depth and breadth of our integration into the school and community.”

As one of the lead agencies bringing staff and services to the project, Riverbend will be engaged with teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, kids, and families in a way that is both new and unprecedented.

“School is where children spend much of their day, and school success is vital to a child’s trajectory into adult life,” said Cummings. “*The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative* will enable us to improve and deepen our relationships with everyone who touches a child’s life. We’ll be a very real and present part of the school’s culture, with our clinicians engaged at all levels, and more accessible and available to everyone.”

Continued on page 4

Integrated Care in our Schools and Community... *Continued*

What integration looks like

One of the key goals of the project—Promoting mental, emotional, and behavioral health—will result in better access to services, and a significant increase in the number of children and families receiving them.

The action steps identified to achieve this goal include:

- **Building Capacity:** Dedicated Riverbend clinicians will be available at four schools, with the goal of adding more schools with dedicated staff in the future.
- **Education and Training:** In addition to consultations, Riverbend clinicians will also provide staff and parent training, and lead psycho/educational student groups.
- **Professional Development:** Riverbend will provide professional development opportunities for faculty about behavioral health issues.

“The action steps we’ve identified initially will evolve over time,” said Lazzar. “And that’s an essential aspect of creating something new. We have some great evidence-based practices to follow, and we’ll be adapting them to fit each individual school, child, family, and situation.”

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative will enable us to show that treatment works best when behavioral health services are more fully integrated into the school and community culture.

– Chris Cummings



Sustainability

While the project is just getting started, important benchmarks have been established and will be tracked closely over the four-year grant period. “We’ll be demonstrating improvements in a wide range of areas,” Lazzar said, “because we want what we are accomplishing in Concord, Rochester, and Laconia to be valued and sustained—not only in these communities, but also to be replicated in other school districts throughout the state.”

Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project — Concord

Partner Agencies (as of March 2015)

Ascentria Care Alliance
Boys and Girls Clubs of Central New Hampshire
Child and Family Services of New Hampshire
City of Concord, Parks and Recreation Department
Community Bridges
Concord School District
Concord Head Start
Concord Housing Authority
Concord Police Department
Granite State Federation of Families
Granite United Way
New Hampshire Center for Effective Behavioral Interventions and Supports
Riverbend Community Mental Health
Second Start
State of New Hampshire,
Department of Juvenile Justice Services
State of New Hampshire,
Division of Children, Youth, and Families
21st Century After School Programs
University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability

Cummings echoed Lazzar’s sentiments when she explained the longer-term impact of the program for Riverbend, and the children and families in the greater Concord community.

“Essentially, we’ll be showing that treatment works *best* when behavioral health services are more fully integrated into the school and community culture,” Cummings said. “And that is—and should be—a paradigm-shifting accomplishment.”

Learn more about the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative at www.sshs.samhsa.gov/initiative/about.aspx

NOTE: The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative in Concord will have its own website this fall. Watch the district website for updates. www.concordschools.net

New pilot project at local schools...

Helping kids manage stress and anxiety



What is anxiety?

As adults we understand that anxiety is a normal response to something dangerous or stressful. We all experience varying degrees of stress and anxiety in our day-to-day lives—whenever worrisome thoughts distract us in unhelpful ways. And some of us may know, through deeper personal challenges, that anxiety can become an even bigger problem when it shows up at unexpected times and takes a firm hold.

Years of research and clinical experience have shown us that anxiety has nothing to do with strength, or courage, or character. Anxiety picks a target and switches on. And when that target is a child or teenager, it can be particularly distressing.

What does anxiety in kids look like?

“Anxiety in kids may express itself in a variety of ways,” said Valerie Piper, a Riverbend Child and Family Therapist who has been providing services in local schools for several years, and is currently coordinating the Child Anxiety Program at Pittsfield Elementary School. “There might be problems with sleeping, eating, withdrawal from social interactions, and missed school because of unexplained illnesses,”

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The Child Anxiety Program is a new pilot project launched by Riverbend in the fall of 2014. Funded in part by generous grants from Lincoln Financial and the Safe School/Healthy Students Initiative (see page 2), the program is bringing specialized services to several schools in the greater Concord area (see box) this year. The overall goal is to equip more children with the skills they need to understand and manage their anxiety, and to be less afraid to participate in the world and relationships around them.

“We’ve learned so much over the years about how debilitating anxiety can be for a child, and how it can negatively affect adult life in significant ways,” said Chris Cummings, Director of Children’s Services at Riverbend. “The good news is that child anxiety is *very* treatable, and young kids are particularly responsive to treatment. The Child Anxiety Program provides Riverbend with a wonderful opportunity to bring proven and effective

cognitive behavioral skills to more kids, so that those who struggle with anxiety can succeed in school and fully participate in their lives,” Cummings added.

Riverbend clinicians also work with a school’s guidance and teaching staff—as well as parents—so the new skills that children are learning can be supported in the classroom and at home.

The Child Anxiety Program Pilot Project

Groups have taken place, are currently operating, or are planned at the following schools:

Rundlett Middle School	Pembroke Academy
Beaver Meadow Elementary School	Pittsfield Elementary School
Broken Ground Elementary School	Pittsfield Middle High School
Hillsboro/Deering Elementary School	Rundlett Middle School
Kearsarge High School	



Ongoing anxiety groups for kids

Riverbend offers groups for kids who have anxiety. Groups are held at our offices in Concord.

For information call **603-228-0547**

Helping kids manage stress and anxiety... *Continued*

Piper continued, “and it all begins to compound and build upon itself.”

Piper explained that the Child Anxiety Program at all school locations is rooted in proven Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques that are highly effective in the treatment of anxiety, particularly in young people. A model is followed, but there is flexibility in how the model is used in each school setting.

“Kids, particularly young kids, make the right connections when they’re given the right information and support,” Piper said. “It’s about letting kids know that they aren’t alone, that lots of kids and adults experience anxiety, and that there are things they can do to take control over it. For most of the kids I’ve worked with, this learning is truly liberating for them,” Piper added.

What are the skills?

Other than getting kids talking about their anxiety, normalizing it by providing good information, and explaining a bit about why anxiety feels like it does — and how our brains function — the Riverbend clinicians who facilitate the 8-week program also equip kids with valuable tools for centering and calming themselves when anxiety looms. Here are two examples:

Anxiety interrupts normal breathing patterns, and this can feed the severity of the anxious feelings. “One of the things we teach kids is how to breathe,” Piper said. “Even the youngest child can learn basic breathing techniques,

and remembering to breathe — to be able to focus on one’s breathing — is a very powerful tool for anxious kids to have in their toolbox,” Piper explained.

Another ability that children learn to develop is referred to as “mindfulness” in popular literature. Mindfulness is essentially about being aware of the present moment. “There is an abundance of scientific research that demonstrates the profound positive effects of mindfulness,” Piper said [see box]. “I usually explain it by telling kids that anxiety comes about because of worry about the future and what might happen, and being in the moment helps you have control over your brain so you can stop your brain from worrying about things it doesn’t need to. It trains your brain to stay in the here and now.”

The impact

Piper reported that she knows that the skills she has taught kids are being retained and practiced beyond the 8-week groups she’s conducted, and told a story she recently heard from a guidance counselor.

“There was a kid who was in one of my groups last fall who recently experienced an event in his life that could have been extremely anxiety-producing,” Piper said. “And the guidance counselor told me that when he asked how she was, the child turned to him, smiled, and said ‘I used my skills.’ As a teacher and clinician, hearing that was a wonderful thing,” Piper concluded.

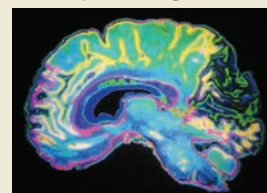
Learn more about Riverbend services for children and adolescents at www.riverbendcmhc.org

Mindfulness: Proof of the Benefits

MRI studies have shown that practicing mindfulness increases the density of grey matter in the brain, providing relief and protection from stress, anxiety, and depression. In the first study of its kind, researchers at Harvard have established scientific proof that meditation can change the brain’s gray matter. After 8 weeks of practicing mindfulness exercises for an average of 27 minutes per day, MRI scans of participants showed that mindfulness:

- stimulated a significant increase in the density of gray matter in the hippocampus, important for learning and memory;
- increased the density of gray matter in other neural structures associated with self-awareness, compassion, and introspection;
- decreased the density of gray matter in the amygdala — the part of the brain associated with anxiety and stress.

According to the **Harvard** study, mindfulness also relieves stress, depression, and anxiety; lowers blood pressure; and improves chronic pain, sleep, capacity to deal with stress, and the ability to form deeper connections with others.



Have a great day at the Boys & Girls Club!

The Boys & Girls Club and Riverbend have worked together for many years. “It was sometime in the 90s when it all began,” said Chris Emond, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central New Hampshire [see box below]. “Our kids and programs have benefitted greatly from the presence and participation of Riverbend staff. We highly value this relationship.”

For children and families who are managing behavioral health challenges, the Club provides a valuable opportunity for growth and learning. “The after school and recreational programs provided by the Boys & Girls Club are important because it *isn’t* school or home,” said Stephanie Rush, a Riverbend Child and Family Therapist who has several clients participating in Club activities. “It’s a different environment, providing a range of different kinds of social interactions, and the Club’s commitment to inclusiveness makes it safe for a child to explore a little and do new things.”

Emond described three essential principles that guide staff in creating the Club experience for local kids.

“First, it’s important for kids to **feel safe** here,” Emond said. “So many kids have told me over

the years that ‘this feels like home’ or ‘this is my second home’—and when kids tell me that, I know they feel safe.”

The second factor is about providing kids with **positive adult role models**. “All kids benefit from having positive adult role models in their lives—adults who care about them and see them clearly,” Emond explained. “The staff at the Boys & Girls Club work very hard to know each individual child, and we pay particular attention to kids who are struggling with something. Sometimes it’s minor, and sometimes it’s not. But the important thing is paying attention and building trust day by day.”

The third thing that Emond describes is about providing kids with **opportunity**—not only in terms of varied programs and activities, but about the opportunity that each *moment* provides. “Opportunity is about helping kids understand how they can make their future brighter *right this moment*, and have a good day, or even a *great day*,” Emond said. “And that’s a powerful bit of learning for anyone,” he added.

Support the Riverbend “Campership” Program at the Boys & Girls Club this summer (see below).



Boys & Girls Clubs of Central New Hampshire

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Central New Hampshire provide after school programs, summer day camps, and basketball leagues to children ranging from kindergarten through grade 12 in Concord, Hopkinton, Suncook, Warner, Franklin and the Lakes Region. The Clubs serve over 1,500 young people each week, are professionally staffed, and offer a safe place to belong.

Learn more about the Boys & Girls Club in your community at www.nhclubkids.org



Chris Emond, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central NH, presenting a William Chapman Scholarship Award to a happy graduate.

You can make this summer totally awesome for a few local kids

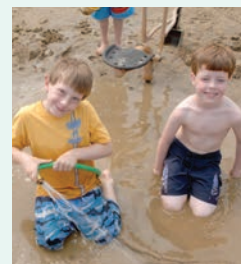
Some think that only broad sweeping gestures can make the world a better place, but the truth is actually the opposite. Changing the world for the better is really about much smaller acts of kindness, advocacy, and sharing. It’s about what we can do *now*.

Do you want to change the world? Helping some of the kids in our community experience summer camp provides a real and wonderful starting place!

Your gift of \$500 will help one child attend. For those who can, we encourage you to consider sponsoring several children. Smaller gifts add up quickly. Our kids and families appreciate *all* the gifts, large and small, that make participation possible.

Donate by check — Write “camperships” in the memo line and mail to: Riverbend Community Mental Health
PO Box 2032 • Concord, NH 03302-2032

Donate online — Visit www.riverbendcmhc.org





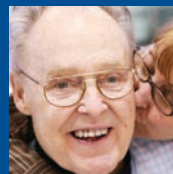
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Closing thoughts... *The keys that unlock a child's potential*

About 15 years ago I was speaking to a big city board of education in a state south of New Hampshire! I was trying to sell the idea of providing behavioral health services for kids in school settings. I was somewhat surprised when the chief of staff to the Superintendent banged her fist on the table and declared: "Nothing will stop us from attaining our goal of educating our kids!"

In my head I was wishing that children *could* keep certain aspects of their lives separate from the classroom—anything that interferes with their learning. That would be so convenient. But it does not happen like that!

Fast forward a decade and I am still south of the border and now responsible for three residential schools providing special education services. The kids are not doing well so we bring in a consultant who tells us that these kids are being "damned by the tyranny of low expectations." These children needed special attention to deal with terrible trauma histories, broken attachments, and low expectations from the adults around them. He told us to raise our expectations of *ourselves*, to study pedagogy as an art form that finds each child's pathway to learning, and to expect that they will succeed.

He went on to say that these kids should not be contained and isolated, but instead experience an environment that is welcoming, loving, and inclusive. A year later all those kids passed the state education proficiency test with the same 'candlepower' of all those who came before them. There are so many reasons that children fail in school, but the least of those reasons is their ability to learn.

We need to keep looking for that individual child's set of keys that will unlock his or her potential by meeting children where they are in their journeys. We need to utilize the most effective and proven strategies we know about to keep kids invested in the educational process. That is how maximum potential is reached.

Have a great summer!

Peter Evers, *President and CEO*

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